

The List by **pathvain aalien**

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Summary: Eleven keeps a list.

The List

For waterbaby134, who wanted to know where Mike falls on the list.

The List

Eleven keeps a list.

It helps remind her that someday she will see them all again. It helps remind her that she, for a little while at least, was a person.

At first she keeps the list in her head. She has to, because she doesn't have any paper. She's in the forest. She is hiding. She is being *safe*. She knows she can't see her friends, because she has already tried. She starts with Mike first, but the Bad Men are there. She stays long enough to make sure he is *safe*, and then leaves. She doesn't want to, but she knows she has to. She has to keep him safe. She goes back to the forest. Hides. Eats, when she can. She is *lonely*. She knows what that word means, because the word means Eleven. That is when she begins her list, way back on day 1. It passes the time. It lessens the lonely feeling, the Eleven feeling.

Eleven is, in her own way, a very careful thinker. She has to be, because thinking is hard, and she isn't used to it yet. The Bad Men thought for her. Even Mike thought for her, because she didn't know how. He brought her food, he gave her clothes. He told her to sleep. She remembers the first time in her *after life* when she had to think for herself. When she ran away from her friends. It's a bad memory, so she doesn't think of it often. She only made that decision because she wasn't used to thinking. Now she thinks for herself every day. She's getting better at it. When she is hungry, she finds food. Eats. Stays *safe*. These things require thinking, so she is glad for them, even if they make the lonely Eleven feeling worse.

She is used to the lonely Eleven feeling. She has been living with it for 12 years. She only had a week of the happy El feeling, and that isn't very much. Not compared to 12 years. That week makes up a tiny fragment of her memories, and sometimes she's afraid of losing them. She thinks they can easily be buried under the other 12 years instead, so she replays them constantly in her mind. She is keeping

the memories *safe*. That's how she comes up with her list, and she repeats the names to herself when the lonely Eleven feeling threatens to take over.

And Eleven is a very careful thinker. She thinks very hard about her list. Sometimes the names move around as she puts more thought into them and revisits certain memories. And sometimes they move back, when she visits other memories instead and they are fresher in her mind. That's okay. The important thing is that the *names* never change. They just move around.

One name always stays in place.

She sometimes wonders if other people keep lists, too. She thinks they probably don't. They don't have to, because they've never had that lonely Eleven feeling. They don't have to force themselves to remember the happy feeling. That is a difference between not-normal and *normal*, but it's one she's okay with. She senses that someday, she won't have to keep a list anymore. She will be El, forever. She will have too many people to list.

At first, in the forest, Hopper is last on her list. She includes him on her list because he was there the night of the bathtub. He held her hand, which is why he is on her list. He helped find Will, which is why he is on her list. She knows Will is *safe* now, because she can feel him. And she has seen him. Hopper helped with that. But Eleven only spoke with Hopper once that night, so she can't move him any higher on the list. He is only promoted when she comes to live with him. When he gives her a home. When he brings her Eggos. When he gives her TV. She likes Hopper. Hopper is *mostly* nice. Not always. Sometimes he yells. Sometimes he's angry. She doesn't understand that he's not angry with *her*. And he doesn't understand the way she sometimes speaks with her eyes instead of the normal way.

She likes him, but he keeps her inside. Away from the rest of her list. That is why he is only 6th on her list.

At first, her list is only 6 names. 6 is okay. 6 is good. It is 6 more than she has ever had before, and that gives her the happy El feeling. Each name is a name from that last night. The night at the school. But Eleven is a very careful thinker. When she is safe with Hopper, she is

able to add more names to her list. The list is getting longer, and she carefully writes them down. She writes them in her math workbook, because sometimes she gets bored with numbers. She already knows numbers. She has to, because she is Eleven. And Eleven is a number.

Sometimes, when she revisits her memories, she makes revisions. She scratches out the names, and rewrites them. Her math workbook is covered in scribbles and eventually Hopper gives her paper, paper just for her list. He can't understand her eye-speak, and she can't tell him another way, but he does notice when she runs out of room for the words. He sees that he is 8th on the list, because she has added more names. She feels bad that he isn't any higher. She is suddenly all eyes, because she thinks he will be mad. He will take away the TV. He will stop giving her Eggos. He will stop keeping her *safe*. His eyebrows are raised and she can't read his face. The lonely Eleven feeling is suddenly strangling her and eye-speak is the only way she can communicate, because her mouth isn't working anymore.

But it's okay. He looks at the list, and he looks at her, and even Hopper can read her eyes this time. He laughs, and tells her *eighth isn't so bad*. She starts to relax. He pats her awkwardly on the shoulder. She can tell he isn't used to it. He says, *just happy to be nominated*. She doesn't understand what that means, or what *nominated* is, but she understands the first part. He is happy. He is happy to be on her list. Then he asks, *want an Eggo, kid?* And her list is momentarily forgotten, because she's already in the tiny kitchen. Later, before bed, she moves him back to 6th, and that is where he stays.

Hopper is happy to be on her list, to be someone that she trusts. He doesn't care where his name falls on the list, just that it's included. Looking at his name, carefully printed in her best handwriting, he gets that feeling. The feeling that Eleven would recognize. It's not a good feeling. She would call it the *monster feeling*. It's guilt. It's guilt, because Hopper has a secret.

He knows that if she ever discovers it, he will no longer be on her list.

He knows that if she ever finds out the secret, she will kill him.

But Eleven is blissfully unaware of his monster feeling, and his secret, and she is as happy as she can be right now, with the 6th person on her list.

Nancy is 7th on her list. She is on her list because she was there, *that night*, at the school. She is there because she is brave. Nancy is on her list because she is Mike's sister, and will be *her* sister, too. Someday. Mike has told her, and *friends don't lie*. Nancy is on her list because she is a *badass*. That means something good, even if it has bad in the name. It means that she fought the Demogorgon, too. Eleven doesn't blame her for failing. Most people would fail against the Demogorgon. Eleven is well aware of one pertinent fact. She knows that most people wouldn't even *try*. They would run. Nancy didn't run, so she is on her list.

She is on her list because she gave her a dress, and her first hair. She gave her the pretty feeling. The happy El feeling. She knows that Nancy wasn't aware of her gifts, but that doesn't count. It still earns her a place on the list. She is on her list because Eleven was in her room, and saw the first evidence of that happy feeling. She saw pictures of family and friends. Stuffed animals. Nancy's room was her first glimpse of *home*. A place where the lonely Eleven feeling didn't exist, at least not yet. She is on her list because she lost someone in the Upside Down. Eleven knows, because Eleven found her. Eleven can feel Nancy's pain that last night, and her heart opens to her. Nancy is feeling the lonely Eleven feeling, and Eleven would do anything to get rid of that feeling for her.

And that's why Nancy is 7th on her list.

Jonathan is 8th on her list, now that Hopper has moved back to 6th. She has never really spoken to him, but she senses his goodness on that last night. She senses that Nancy likes him. She senses that Mike likes him. She sees his pain and fear for Will, and her heart opens for him, too. He is a *brother*. She wishes she had a *brother*. Although she will be Nancy's sister someday, she will not have a brother. Mike has told her so. Mike will be her friend. And that's okay. She wants a brother, but doesn't want it to be Mike. She would rather he just be *Mike*. She knows that brothers are good, though. They keep you *safe*. She knows that Jonathan would do anything to keep Will *safe*.

Jonathan is Will's brother, and Joyce's son, and that earns him the 8th place on her list.

Joyce is 5th on her list. That means she likes Joyce 5th best. She only knew her for a day, but she will *never, ever, ever* forget Joyce. Eleven makes sure of it. She revisits the Joyce memories often. Eleven has never had a *mother*, but she knows that when Joyce hugs her, she is *safe*. Protected. Warm. She wishes Joyce were her *mother*. She loves Joyce, because she sees what Joyce will do for her son.

And what she *won't* do. She will go to the Upside Down to find her son, she will stay in a house where monsters live in the walls. Joyce would do almost anything for her children. Eleven knows that Joyce would die for her children. But she wouldn't sacrifice someone for them. Eleven remembers her soothing voice, on that last night. Joyce says, *if it ever gets to be too much, tell me*.

Joyce *knows* that Eleven can find her son. She knows that Eleven is the only one who can. But Joyce won't force her. Joyce lets her have the choice. Choices are rare for Eleven and she savors them. She chooses to help Joyce, to help Will, to help *all* of the people on her list. But it's nice to know that she doesn't have to. Joyce won't make her. Joyce will be kind to her no matter what. Joyce calls her a *brave girl* and that is a new thing. A *good* thing. She isn't used to that yet. Joyce holds her hand, and with more naturalness than Hopper. Eleven can tell that Hopper is uncomfortable, but Joyce isn't. She can sense the way Joyce feels about her almost instantly. She senses that Joyce would like to give her a *home*. Would like to be *mother*.

She knows that normal people don't keep lists of the people they like best. She also knows that if they did, she would be on Joyce's list, too. Somewhere. And that is why Joyce is 5th on her list.

Mike's dad is 11th on her list. 11th isn't very high on her list, but it's okay. 11 is still a special number. A *good* number. The number deserves to be on her list. She has never spoken to him. She has only seen him in pictures and once, for a second, at the dinner table. She has been in his chair, which is for *lazy boys*, but Mike let her sit in it even though Eleven is a girl. It's one of the first things Mike ever showed her. It's the first time she laughed, in either her *before life* or *after life*. It's the first time she laughed with someone who was

laughing, too. It's the first of the happy El feelings, and one of the most important. She knows the feeling mostly belongs to Mike, but she gives credit where credit is due. It was *his* chair, and that's where she laughed. So he is on her list. She doesn't even know his name, so she just writes *Mike's dad* in her careful handwriting. She only knows a few things about Mike's dad. First, he is Mike's dad. And she *does* know Mike. Mike is good and kind, and her friend. Eleven knows nothing about nature versus nurture, but she is a careful thinker. She thinks that Mike's dad must be like Mike, at least a little, because they are related. Eleven isn't related to anyone. The man she calls Papa isn't really her father, and for that, she is glad.

The last and most important thing that she knows about Mike's dad is that he is not like Papa. And that would earn *anyone* a place on the list.

She hasn't forgotten Mike's mom. Mike's mom is 10th on her list. She is higher on the list than Mike's dad, because Mike said she will be Eleven's mother someday. Eleven would rather have Joyce, but she thinks she will like Mike's mom, too. After all, she *is* Mike's mom. Mike's mom will feed her Eggos. She will give her a bed. She will give her a *home*. She will take care of her.

She will allow Eleven to be part of Mike's *home*. Eleven will be able to see Mike every day. Whenever she wants. So even though she doesn't really know Mike's mom, not even her name, she deserves a place on the list.

There is someone that she likes better than Mike's mom and dad. He is 9th on her list. Like many of the people on her list, she has only spoken with him once. But he was kind to her. He looked at her and didn't sense her freakishness. He didn't see a number. She was just a person. She had the happy El feeling she rarely gets.

Mr. Clarke is 9th on her list.

She knows that he is *good*, because he taught the boys how to find Will. About the flea and the acrobat. He taught them how to make the bath. That's a scary thing to know, a *Papa* thing, but she knows he isn't like Papa at all. He just knows *science*. He knows *facts*. She knows how Mike feels about Mr. Clarke. Mike talks about him often

through the radio. Mr. Clarke is like Mike. She doesn't have the words to explain it but it's something she senses. She senses that Mr. Clarke had a Troy and a James of his own once, just because of his goodness. That Mike goodness.

She knows that Mr. Clark would be on *Mike's* list, if Mike kept a list, and that is why he is on hers.

Lucas is 3rd on her list. Lucas is the hardest to fix in place, because she has good and bad memories of him. He called her a *freak*. He called her a *weirdo*. He tried to hurt Mike. He called her a *monster*. She hates that word, because she sometimes gets that monster feeling. She has done bad things. She has been a *bad girl*.

She has killed.

But Lucas is Mike's friend. Mike chose him. And she trusts Mike. She knows she is right to trust him, because Lucas forgives her for hurting him. And he asks her to forgive him. He says she is *awesome*. He says that she is his *friend*. When the Bad Men come for her, he tries to protect her. He tells them to *eat shit*. She doesn't know what that means, except that he wants to keep her *safe*. Lucas is brave. He has proven that to her over and over again, and she hasn't even known him very long. He would have died for her, three different times. The first is when she flips the van. The second is when the Bad Men come.

The third is the Demogorgon.

Like Nancy, Lucas doesn't try to run. He doesn't hide. He doesn't give her to the monster. He sees that Eleven is weak from using too much of her power and he tries to keep her safe. He doesn't ask *her* to kill it. He steps in front of her instead and uses his wrist rocket. He tries to kill it instead. She doesn't blame him for failing. Not many people could kill the Demogorgon. The important thing is that he decided *she* wasn't the monster, and protected her from the real one. His bravery earns him a place on her list.

Right now, Will is 4th on her list. She sometimes puts Will in front of Lucas on the list, because she thinks she will like Will a lot. She isn't sure, but she hopes she gets the chance to find out. She hopes that she can get to know them both, because they are both *awesome*. She

has touched Will's mind, in the Upside Down. She had to, in order to find him. Even though she's only spoken to him once, they are connected. She has that magnet feeling with him, at least a little. She knows him, at least a little. She *felt* him.

He is one of those rare people who are purely *good*, like Mike. Will is gentle, gentler than Lucas, and even more understanding than Dustin. She senses that Will might even hear her when she can't speak, not with her mouth anyway. When she can only talk with her eyes. She senses that he can do this, because he is a little bit like her now. Sometimes his mouth doesn't work. He has felt the darkness. He knows how to speak with his eyes, too. This earns him a place on her list. For now, it's 4th. That may change someday. She hopes to find out.

Dustin is 2nd on her list. Someday, he might not be. She isn't sure. She likes Dustin a lot. Dustin is funny. She doesn't always understand the jokes, but she *does* understand that he wants to make people happy. He wants to make them laugh. Dustin is kind. He accepted her from the very beginning. He liked her power. Most people are afraid of it. Sometimes they like it and also fear it. Like Papa. Dustin isn't like that at all. He just thinks she's *cool*. To him, she is a *hero*. She isn't just a number, she is his *friend*.

Dustin is wise. He understands how to find the gate, even if she wishes he didn't try. He understands a lot, much more than Lucas. Maybe more than Will, at least until the Upside Down. She knows the Upside Down has changed Will. He has his own *after life*. Dustin carries her when she is weak from using her power. He doesn't leave her behind. He is brave, too. Most of the people on her list are brave. She remembers the day at the cliff. The *mouth breathers* would have hurt Dustin very badly, but he was okay with that. As long as it kept Mike *safe*. It's the first time she really understands what friends are, and she is grateful for that. She is grateful for *him*.

That is her list.

So far, at least. In time she hopes to add more, and the names may move. They don't have to stay fixed in place, because they will always be on her list. Somewhere. She knows that even if she never adds another name, she will be happy. Because she has 11 people

right now, which is 11 more than she's ever had before. She knows how lucky she is. She will be happy for the rest of her life if she can only have 11.

When she's waiting for Mike to call, she likes to look at her list. She keeps the list in her *pocket*, which is a special place for special things like her list. The *pocket* keeps her list close. It keeps her friends close. The list is getting worn because she looks at it so much. That's okay. She can always make a new list, because the names move a lot. They are allowed to, as she thinks of her friends and their importance to her.

Only one name is fixed in place. And it will *never* move.

Mike is always first.